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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000057

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AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM IV](#)
SUBJECT: Dispute Process Extended; CEI Commissioners Protest

REF: 10 ABIDJAN 15

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Embassy Abidjan; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (U) Summary: After weeks of speculation, the Prime Minister's Office and the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) announced on February 2 that the period for filing challenges to the provisional electoral list will be reopened from February 4 through 14. The day after the announcement was made, 10 of the 31 central CEI commissioners signed a joint declaration stating they would "abstain" from fulfilling their duties during the reopened process. They stated they would not cooperate with the prime minister's observation committees and urged all CEI commissioners to follow their example. Meanwhile a set of disturbing incidents, including protests in Divo, Katiola, and Man, and a break-in into a CEI office in Abidjan, seem to signal a general sense of uneasiness about the electoral process. End Summary

DISPUTE PROCESS RE-OPENED, BUT COMMISSIONERS WON'T WORK

¶2. (C) The dispute process, which officially came to an end on January 9, will be reopened from February 4 through 14, according to a February 2 CEI announcement. Ten central CEI commissioners (most of whom are thought to be pro-FPI) reacted to this news by issuing a joint declaration on February 3, stating they would not assist with the dispute process, nor cooperate with the observation committees set up by the Prime Minister's office (ref A). The commissioners cited "increasing administrative and procedural anomalies" on the part of CEI President Mambe as the reason for their decision and stated that they would "abstain" from working until the fraud scandal is cleared up. Alain Dogou, one of the CEI's four vice-presidents and President Gbagbo's representative at the CEI, told Emboffs on February 5 that Mambe has lost support among the commissioners, as many continue to question what role he played in the scandal. Dogou said this loss of confidence has weakened the leadership of the CEI, citing the example of one central commissioner who, without Mambe's permission, asked all of the regional CEI commissioners reporting to him to close their offices following the February 3 declaration.

DISTURBING INCIDENTS MULTIPLY

¶3. (SBU) While the CEI is wracked by internal divisions, disturbances in the electoral landscape seem to be on the rise. Demonstrators in Divo, a southern city not far from Abidjan which saw considerable electoral violence during the 2000 elections, clashed with police on February 1. The incident began after police arrested and detained three people after members of the ruling FPI party claimed they were foreigners who had fraudulently registered themselves on the provisional electoral list. Two police officers were injured in the clash; seven demonstrators suffered from bullet-related injuries.

The following day (February 2), the town hall responsible for administrative documents in the northern city of Katiola repeatedly refused authorized requests to examine the town's birth registry in an attempt to verify the nationality of some petitioners who were accused of being foreign. As a result, youth from the opposition RHDP coalition protested, destroying property in the process.

That same day, newspapers reported that three opposition RDR members working at a CEI in the Attecoubé neighborhood of Abidjan broke into the CEI office and took 19 boxes of petitioner cases under dispute. The RDR members claimed the break-in was necessary because the FPI head of office had locked up the documents and refused to transfer them to the observation committees in compliance with the prime minister's instructions.

The embassy received an unconfirmed report from an NGO implementing a U.S. grant that today (February 5) pro-ruling party demonstrators are protesting in the western city of Man and are blocking CEI operations from taking place.

14. (C) Comment: This latest declaration by the ten CEI commissioners is disturbing on several levels. Although it is no secret that the president's camp was against the CEI's creation

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from its inception (the majority of the commissioners are affiliated with the opposition, including CEI President Mambe), this marks the first time the organization's integrity is being attacked from within. It also seems that with Mambe's presidency in question, individual CEI commissioners at the national and regional level are now deciding on an individual basis whether or not they will implement the prime minister's directive to transfer disputed cases to the observation committees for a decision. The end result is that some CEI offices untouched by the scandal have continued working, while others have stopped work completely or have been prevented from working by protestors. End Comment.
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